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ABSTRACT

With the end of the Civil War just 30 years past, the organizers of the Atlanta (Georgia) 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition sought to demonstrate the South's national patriotism and progressivism. While the exhibits at the exposition widely varied, among the most ambitious undertakings were the displays of fine arts found in the Fine Arts Building, the Woman's Building, and the Negro Building. This learning packet concentrates on the art displayed at those three locations. A painting by French artist Luc Olivier Merson exemplifies the work displayed in the Fine Arts Building. An etching by Mary Nimmo Moran featured in the Woman's Building is discussed. Last, a painting by the African-American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner represents work that was on view at the first-ever Negro Building at a world's fair. After brief overviews of the exhibitions at the three buildings, the artists and their works, there are lists of suggested questions and discussion topics. Also included are lists of references for the art and artists, and suggested readings for further study of the era and people that brought about this exposition. (MM)

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Learning Packet

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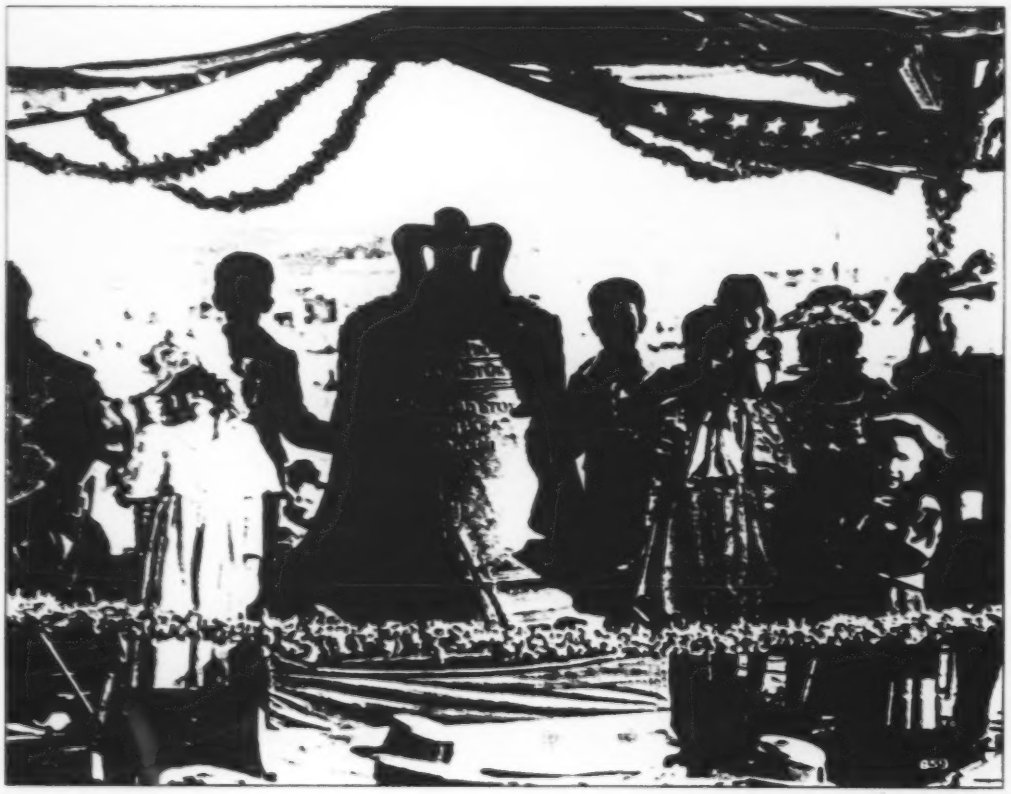

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Fine Art at the Cotton States and International Exposition: Atlanta, 1895

Learning Packet

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Cover photograph:
Frederick L. Howe
Children at the Liberty Bell, Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895
courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

Fine Art at the Cotton States and International Exposition: Atlanta, 1895
Introduction

In the celebration of the centennial anniversary of the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, the Atlanta History Center and the High Museum of Art have organized exhibitions which present an overview of the Exposition, which was one of a series of world's fairs held in the United States beginning with Philadelphia's centennial exposition in 1876. Organized to boost local economies, these fairs combined entertainment with education, and featured rides, musical performances, and circus-type sideshows, along with exhibition buildings dedicated to specific themes such as agriculture and manufacturing. Typically, these fairs presented and celebrated optimistic visions of the future.

With the end of the Civil War just thirty years past, the organizers of the Atlanta fair sought to demonstrated the South's national patriotism and progressivism. Two special buildings were erected toward this end: the Woman's Building (modeled on the first one, built at the Chicago fair) and the Negro Building (the first building of its kind), was dedicated to showcasing the progress of African Americans since Emancipation. The opening day ceremonies on September 18, 1895, began with a parade to Piedmont Park, where Booker T. Washington addressed a racially mixed crowd of 25,000. His speech, later named the "Atlanta Compromise" by his critics, led to Washington's recognition by the white press as a spokesman for the country's African Americans.

Great Expectations: The Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895 at the Atlanta History Center from September 16, 1995 to March 3, 1996, creates a portrait of the fair, describes its main goals, and compares the fair's ambitions to the everyday circumstances of life in turn-of-the-century Atlanta, while *Fine Art at the Cotton States and International Exposition: Atlanta, 1895,* at the High Museum of Art from August 19 - December 31, 1995, focuses on the paintings, sculptures, drawings, illustrations, architectural renderings, and prints that were on view at this impressive venture of the "new South."

While the exhibits at the Exposition widely varied, ranging from United States government displays on the Weather Bureau and Postal Service to a Moorish Palace and Wild West show. One of the most ambitious undertakings was the display of the fine arts, which could be found in the Fine Arts Building, the Woman's Building, and the Negro Building. This Learning Packet will concentrate on the art displayed at those three locations: A painting by French artist Luc Olivier Merson has been selected as an example of the work displayed in the Fine Arts Building, an etching by Mary Nimmo Moran will be discussed from the Woman's Building, and a painting by the African-American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner will represent work that was on view at the first-ever Negro Building at a

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world's fair. These works of art have been selected for this packet in part because they belong to the High Museum of Art's permanent collection, allowing you to explore the artistic, historical, and cultural context of the art works even after this particular exhibition has ended.

After brief overviews of the exhibitions at the three buildings–the artists and their works–there are lists of suggested questions and discussion topics. These are designed to help your students understand the historical significance of these works and why they were displayed. Also included in the packet are lists of references for the art and artists and suggested readings for further study of the era and people that brought about this Exposition.

Fine Art at the Cotton States and International Exposition: Atlanta, 1895 was organized by the High Museum of Art. **Generous support for the exhibition has been provided by the Katherine John Murphy Foundation in honor of John Spalding, the Exposition Foundation, Inc., the James Starr Moore Memorial Foundation in honor of Frances Floyd Cocke, the David, Helen and Marian Woodward Fund, the Atlanta Foundation-Emory Cocke Fund, the Cecil B. Day Family, the John and Mary Franklin Foundation, the Frank Garson II Fund in honor of Charlotte and Dan Garson, Anne L. Harper, Maier & Berkele, NationsBank, the Rich Foundation, and Wachovia Bank of Georgia. Media support for the exhibition has been provided by the Altanta Journal and Constitution.**

Fine Arts Building

SLIDE 1
Luc Olivier Merson
French, 1846-1920
***"Je vous salue, Marie" ("Hail, Mary"),* ca. 1885**
Oil on canvas
High Museum of Art, gift of the Piedmont Driving Club, 40.9

I. The Exhibition

In the Fine Arts Building, American art was displayed alongside European art to demonstrate that American artists were rising to level of skill of their counterparts overseas. In fact, art exhibitions at American world's fairs were viewed as roughly equivalent to the Salon exhibits, the largest and most prestigious annual exhibit held in Paris. Works of art at world's fairs were hung in "salon style," meaning that paintings or prints would cover the wall from floor to ceiling, in a much more crowded manner of display than we find in museums today. For the artist, having one's work accepted to a world's fair exhibition implied a certain level of professionalism and an opportunity for exposure to a wider American audience.

Horace Bradley, Chief of the Department of Fine Arts, brought together about 800 works of art from a wide range of media, including paintings, sculptures, architectural renderings, original drawings for book illustrations, and prints. Although no single style or subject matter seemed to be preferred, sentimental genre works–realistically painted scenes of everyday life–dominated the exhibitions.

II. The Artist

The painting *"Je vous salue, Marie" ("Hail Mary")* by French artist Luc Olivier Merson represented what Americans at that time viewed as the high European standards in fine art. Merson, born in France in 1846, came from an academic-style artistic lineage both personally and professionally. His father was an artist and critic, while his teacher at the renowned Ecole des Beaux-Arts had won the Prix de Rome, the most important commendation for the traditionally trained artist. Merson followed within the accepted methods of painting, and he too was honored by his inclusion into the Paris Salon. He also won the Prix de Rome, which enabled him to study in Italy where he was influenced by fourteenth-century masters of religious scenes such as Fra Angelico.

III. The Work of Art

Like the Italian masters he studied, Merson also portrayed religious subjects. He tended to render them in a humble manner, as we see in this scene of the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus standing quietly beside a haystack in a country village. The peasant with his child returns home from working in the fields and simply tips his hat in greeting to the Virgin Mary. Had the title *"Hail, Mary"* not been included, or if the halos adorning the heads of the woman and child were not visible, you could mistake this for a scene of daily occurrence. Even the soft tones and relatively loose brush work give this painting a quiet, informal sense, instead of a sense of monumental occasion you might expect from having had a vision of the Virgin Mary. *"Je vous salue, Marie"* combines the academic training and accepted subject matter of the European academies with a simplicity and accessibility in the choice of setting and style. It was very much admired by its American audience and was awarded the gold medal at the Exposition. Horace Bradley, the organizer of the exhibition even conviced the Piedmont Driving Club, a prominent and exclusive Atlanta social club, to purchase this work, which they later gave to the High Museum of Art.

IV. Suggested Questions and Discussion Topics

1. Why was it important to the American audience attending these fine art exhibitions that art from America be hung with art from Europe?

2. What did it mean to be an "academically trained" artist in the 1890s? What other types of training were there for artists in those days?

3. What would an art critic in 1895 covering this exhibition for a local newspaper write about the painting *"Je vous salue, Marie"*?

4. Why do you think the Piedmont Driving Club agreed to buy this painting?

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Woman's Building

SLIDE 2
Mary Nimmo Moran
American, 1842-1899
***'Tween the Gloamin' and the Mirk When the Rye Came Home*, 1883**
Etching, drypoint, and roulette
High Museum of Art, purchase with Stratton Industries Fund, 1982.46

I. The Exhibition

The first Woman's Building at a world's fair was in Chicago in 1893. Under the guidance of Emma Mims Thompson, the women of Atlanta also planned exhibitions which would present a model of the ideal woman in every field of endeavor. Woman came from many different states to display their skills in glovemaking, weaving, lacemaking, porcelain painting, needlework, and other applied arts. There was also an exhibition of colonial relics and an in-house, on-going kindergarten where visitors could observe the latest methods in educating young children. The Liberty Bell was brought to Atlanta under the sponsorship of the Woman's Building organizers. A special day was held to celebrate its arrival, and schools were closed so that children could visit the historic monument (see cover photograph).

The fine art exhibitions at the Woman's Building included works mostly from amateur artists in clubs and schools. It was also planned that work by professional women artists be displayed in the Woman's Building, but because of the limited wall space and poor lighting in the building, much of the professional women's work was displayed with their male colleagues in the Fine Arts Building.

II. The Artist

One of the artists represented in the Woman's Building, Mary Nimmo Moran would have been accustomed to having her works displayed. By 1895, Moran, a painter, illustrator, and etcher, had already exhibited at several art associations and expositions around the country. She had learned to draw and paint from her husband, the prominent landscape painter and etcher Thomas Moran. With her husband, she traveled throughout the United States and Europe and made etchings on most of her trips, but she specialized in scenes of her home in East Hampton, New York.

III. The Work of Art

Moran was creating etchings at the height of that artistic medium's revival. Prior to the 1870s artists would employ etching mainly for the reproduction of famous paintings and drawings. When American artists began to travel abroad later in the century, they were inspired by the innovative European printmakers and their techniques. These American artists were interested in etchings because they allowed the freedom of drawing. Lines are drawn onto a metal plate with a needle, in the same way one takes a pencil to paper. The plate is then dipped into an acid bath to create lines deep enough to fill with ink. Moran, in her work *'Tween the Gloamin' and the Mirk When the Rye Came Home* has created varieties of depth in the etched lines to develop contrasting dark and light sections on the paper. The result is a dramatic landscape which, although devoid of any characters, gives the viewer the sense of an almost eerie narrative taking place. Black clouds loom overhead, balanced by the lighter patches of the stream in the foreground. The vantage point of the viewer is approaching the bridge, and as the title of the work indicates, a journey is ensuing.

IV. Suggested Questions and Discussion Topics

1. Mary Nimmo Moran learned to paint and draw from her husband. How did other women in the late nineteenth century train to become artists?

2. As with the art exhibition held at the Negro Building, do you think it was right for women to have their art exhibit separately from the men's work on display at the Fine Arts building?

3. What subjects would women artists most likely have chosen for their works of art? Consider the limited opportunities women had for travel and artistic training in the nineteenth century.

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Negro Building

SLIDE 3
Henry Ossawa Tanner
American, 1859-1937
Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, ca. 1928
Tempera and varnish on cardboard
High Museum of Art, J. J. Haverty Collection, 49.32

I. The Exhibition

Atlanta's was the first world's fair in which African-Americans participated in exposition presentations and programming. The establishment of a Negro Building to display the accomplishments of African-Americans was embraced as a way to address the race problem, perceived by many as the most significant obstacle in the South's ability to achieve economic success equivalent to that of the North. The art exhibition of the Negro Building was organized by Daniel Freeman, a young photographer and painter from Washington, D.C. It was not easy for him to pull together an exhibition since many African-American artists refused to exhibit separately from white artists and felt the exhibition would not be taken seriously in the South. Despite the obstacles, Freeman organized a small exhibition, including works by artists from Atlanta and across the United States.

II. The Artist

Henry Ossawa Turner, an artist who left Atlanta for Paris because of racial prejudice, had the opportunity to exhibit his work in the United States at the Cotton States and International Exposition. There is some question as to whether Tanner would have approved of the inclusion of his works in the Negro Building. Tanner's patron Robert Ogden, however, submitted Tanner's works to the Negro Building exhibition because, as Ogden wrote in a letter to Booker T. Washington, dated October 17, 1895, he felt that, displayed in the Fine Arts Building, Tanner's work "would have lost their distinctive race influence and character if placed in the general art exhibition." He went onto explain, "My purpose was to get the influence of Mr. Tanner's genius on the side of the race he represents and at the same time I did not want to degrade [them] by inharmonious associations with inferior work."

It was important that Tanner's talents could now be distinguished and recognized in the United States. Although he was trained in his hometown of Philadelphia by Thomas Eakins, one of the American masters of academic style painting, and he then lived for a time in Atlanta, Tanner did not achieve notice until he moved to Paris. Like Luc Olivier Merson, Tanner was included among the artists at the Salon. He exhibited first in 1894 and continued to do so until the 1920s.

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III. The Work of Art

Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by Tanner belongs to the High Museum of Art's permanent collection, and, although this particular work was not on view at the Cotton States and International Exposition, it represents the artistic style of the works that were displayed: *The Bagpipe Lesson*, *The Banjo Lesson* and *Lion's Head*. The *Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* depicts the moment in the Bible when Lot and his family have been granted escape by God from the evil cities of Sodom and Gommorah. In the 1920s Tanner specialized in biblical subject matter, perhaps inspired by his trips to the Holy Land and, in the case of this painting, inspired by the destruction he saw in France during World War I.

In *Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,* Tanner incorporates beauty with a sense of struggle. Jewel-like hues of bluish-green clouds overwhelm the landscape, but immediately we sense the mood of danger. These billowing clouds arise from Sodom and Gommorah burning in the background. In the foreground at right, two small vertical swatches of paint against the horizontal expanse of land represent Lot and his family fleeing from the evil cities. Although the subject matter is one of destruction and danger, Tanner uses a blend of tempera and oil paint to create luminscent colors and gentle undulating lines. Tanner employed similar blues and greens in his painting *The Bagpipe Lesson*, which won the gold medal for painting in the Negro Building exhibition.

IV. Suggested Questions and Discussion Topics

1. Why do you think Tanner might have wanted his work hung in the Fine Arts Building and not the Negro Building? How would Tanner have responded to his patron Robert Ogden's defense of their placement in the Negro Building?

2. Where would you display Tanner's work, in the Fine Arts Building or the Negro Building?

3. What other African-American artists were active during the late-nineteenth century? Was their artistic training similar to or different from Tanner's?

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